



The Crater Lake Lodge



“A Project Finally Complete”

Crater Lake Lodge was built to encourage tourism to Crater Lake National Park and southwestern Oregon. It opened to guests during the summer of 1915. Its clientele has included people from all over the world. Most guests have fond remembrances of their stays, even though the lodge was often in an unfinished state. Throughout its history, the lodge lacked the expected hotel standards for comfort, privacy, and service, and suffered from neglect.

Construction Season

Before construction of the lodge began in 1909, William G. Steel and other supporters of a hotel had a difficult time finding a developer that would commit to the project. It was not an easy undertaking to build and operate a major lodging facility on the edge of the caldera overlooking Crater Lake. The harsh climate was daunting with severe winter weather lasting more than eight months of the year. At the time, the area was not very accessible. A trip to the park was an arduous journey over many miles of unpaved and poorly constructed roads.

Steel finally convinced Alfred Parkhurst, a Portland developer, to take on the project. However, Parkhurst had no experience constructing buildings that needed to withstand

the weight of 15 foot snow depths that accumulate during Crater Lake’s long winters. Unlike Portland, construction work was limited to a short, three month summer season. Labor and materials had to be brought great distances into the remote and largely undeveloped park. These and other obstacles combined to cause long delays, driving up the cost of the lodge.

Spiraling costs forced Parkhurst to find savings elsewhere in the project. When the lodge opened in the summer of 1915, the furnishings seemed spartan. Exterior walls were clad in tar paper. Interior walls of the guest rooms were finished with thin cardboard-like “beaver board.” There were no private bathrooms, and a small generator provided electricity.

Withstanding 15 Feet of Snow

Although business profits lagged due to high operational costs, Crater Lake Lodge drew large crowds. Early 20th century visitors probably accepted the substandard accommodations because of the rigorous trip needed to reach the park. Though the lodge lacked amenities and atmosphere, visitors were compensated by the magnificent views of Crater Lake and the

surrounding peaks of the Cascade Range.

When it was enlarged and upgraded from 1922 through 1924, the number of guest rooms more than doubled. Plumbing was expanded, and as a result, most of the rooms in the new annex and annex wing had private bathrooms. However, a lack of investment capital plagued the expansion.

Many guest rooms were left unfinished. The lodge suffered with the decline in visitation and business during the early 1930s, the worst years of the Great Depression. Little was spent to keep up the facility. It was not until the mid 1930s that guest rooms on the second and third floors of the annexes were finished. Cars had destroyed most of the surround vegetation, leaving the lodge situated in a barren and very dusty environment.

One of the great improvements made during the 1930s was the development of the landscaping of Rim Village, including plantings around Crater Lake Lodge. In contrast to the privately funded hotel, this publicly funded project was accomplished by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The new landscape included hundreds of indigenous trees and shrubs, helping to blend the structure into its surroundings. As part of the project, new paved parking areas and walkways were built adjacent to the lodge. This significantly reduced the blowing dust and erosion problems around the building as well as giving the area a more “natural” appearance.

Both the park and Crater Lake Lodge were closed for most of World War II. After the war, park visitation increased dramatically, as did business at the lodge. Unfortunately, age and many years of neglect took a heavy toll on the building.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the National Park Service continually prodded, with mixed results, the lodge’s owners to upgrade utilities and fire prevention measures. After fifty years of severe winters on the caldera’s edge, the lodge’s inadequate structural system was showing signs of advanced deterioration. Cables stretched between the north and south walls to try to keep them from bowing. Floors and ceiling were sagging, and cracks appeared in the masonry. Only small amounts of money were invested in piecemeal fashion to keep the lodge open every summer. This Band-Aid approach left utility systems and safety measures lagging behind contemporary codes and standards.

Reconstructing the Lodge

The National Park Service acquired ownership of Crater Lake Lodge in 1967, but the building continued to deteriorate. Despite being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the National Park Service felt that it was too expensive to fix and maintain. The agency failed to implement a proposal to demolish the building once it found strong public opinion to save the lodge. Consequently, the agency approved a plan to save Crater Lake Lodge as part of the comprehensive Rim Village Redevelopment Program in 1988.

Engineers contracted by the National Park Service monitored the structural integrity of the lodge during the 1980s. In the spring of 1989, just before the lodge was to open for the summer, the engineers advised the park that the Great Hall wing was unsafe for occupants. They predicted this part of the building might collapse under its own weight, bringing down the rest of the lodge with it. This compelled the National Park Service to keep the lodge closed and begin a comprehensive rehabilitation project.

The plan to rehabilitate Crater Lake Lodge called for returning the exterior appearance and interior public areas to that of the late 1920s. After nearly two years of planning and design, construction work began in 1991. Some of the original materials, such as the masonry stones, were salvaged for reuse, but very little of the original building could be saved. The Great Hall wing was dismantled and rebuilt. Most of the rest was gutted. A steel structural support system, utilities, safety systems, and modern hotel standards were built into the new facility. The rehabilitation of Crater Lake Lodge was completed in the fall of 1994 at a cost of more than \$15,000,000.

On May 20, 1995, Crater Lake Lodge reopened to the public. Patrons and visitors could again enjoy its accommodations and services safely, and in an atmosphere reminiscent of the 1920s. For the first time since its original opening eighty years before, Crater Lake Lodge was a project finally completed.